# NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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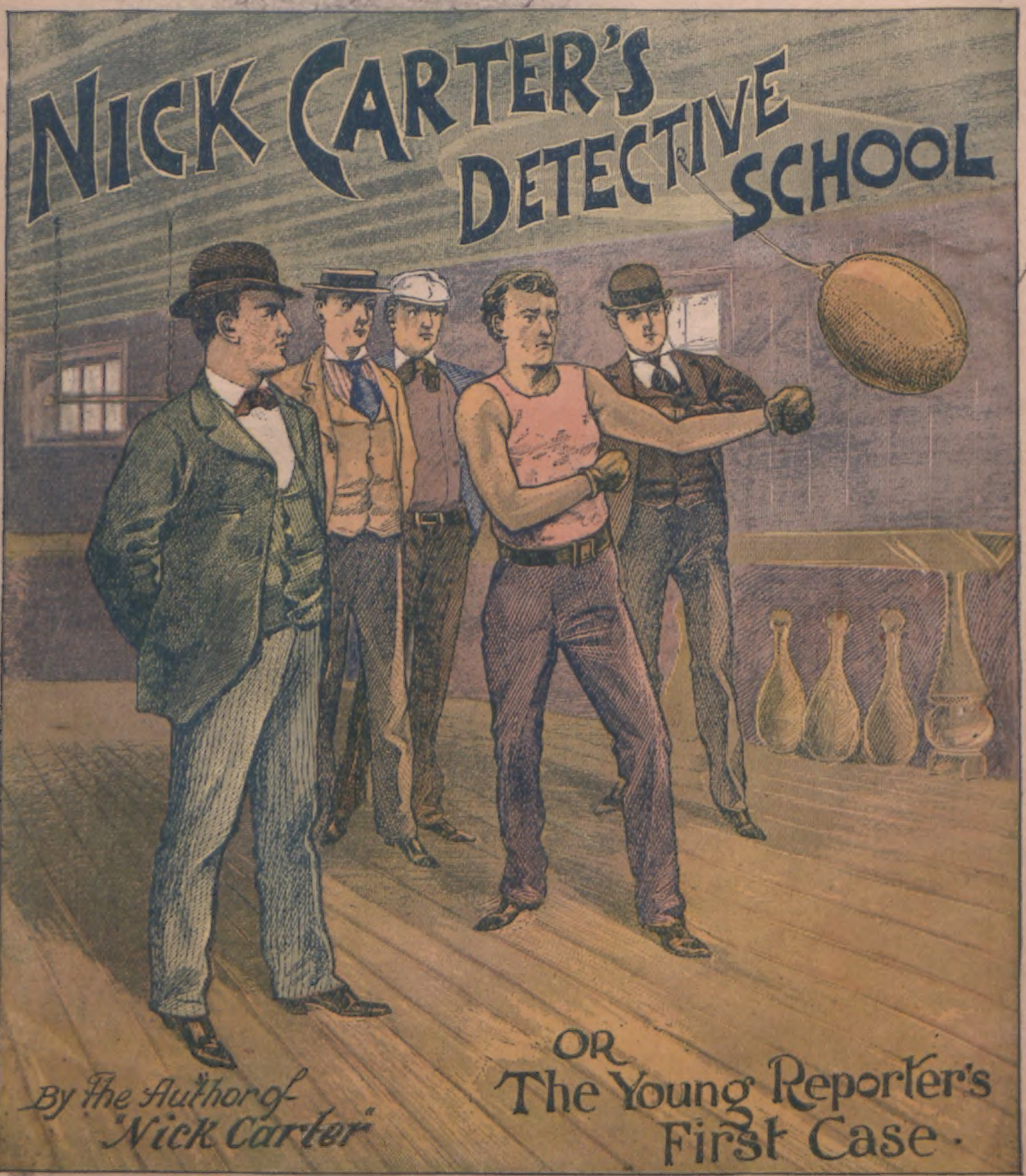


NICK WATCHED THE YOUNG REPORTER WITH CRITICAL EYE.

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# Nick Carter's Detective School

OR,

## The Young Reporter's First Case.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

### CHAPTER I.

DAN'S THEORY OF TREASURE HUNTERS.

"Hit him again, Dan."

This was addressed by a middle-aged, quiet-looking man to a boy who was actively engaged in punching a bag in a gymnasium.

The boy's fists landed with loud whacks against a bag and his feet kept a pattering on the floor as he answered:

"I'm going to—(whack)—Mr. Carter—(whack)—as long as I can stand up," (whack).

Nick Carter, for it was the great detective himself, smiled pleasantly.

His keen eyes took in the boy's lithe form, his quick movements and the expression of determination upon his face.

The gymnasium was not a large one, as it had been made by turning a couple of rooms in Nick Carter's house into one.

Small as it was, however, compared with the gymnasiums of big athletic clubs, it was complete.

There was everything there that could be useful in the development of muscle.

It was a new idea of Nick's.

Having been in the detective business a great many years, and having observed the methods employed by others, he had come to the conclusion that there could be a good deal of improvement in the investigation of crime.

He had, therefore, decided to start a kind of training school for detectives, and his reputation was so great that he found himself overwhelmed with applicants.

As Nick had made too much money in his professional career to be in need of students' fees, he had carefully chosen the students in the hope of selecting only those who had capacity for becoming good detectives.

This boy, Dan Lewis, who was now doing his best to punish a bag, was one of them.

Nick knew from experience that a detective should have a sound, keen mind, as well as an unusually sound body.

He made it a point, therefore, in his training, to cultivate both the mind and the body as thoroughly as possible.

He stood looking at young Lewis with evident satisfaction until the boy, after giving the bag an extra hard thump, paused, panting slightly, and turned to his master.

"Do you want to say something to me, Mr. Carter?" he asked.

"What made you think I did?" returned Nick, with a smile.

"Well, sir," said Dan, "when you come into the gymnasium to see how the boys are getting along you usually seem to take everything in at a glance.

"And you usually stop a boy and show him how to do his work better, or if everything is all right you go out again.

"I thought by the way you stood here looking on that you wanted to say something to me."

"That's good reasoning on a very small matter," answered Nick, "and I hope that you will never forget that in this business small matters are not to be despised.

"You'll often get your most important clews from what seems to be of the least consequence."

"And wasn't my reasoning right, sir?"

"Yes, it was."

Nick glanced about the room, and observing that two or three of the students were looking on, said:

"Put on your clothes and come up to the library. I will talk to you there."

Dan promptly went to his locker to obey, and Nick withdrew with a pleasant word in passing to the other boys.

A few minutes later he and his pupil were together in the room where so many great investigations had been planned.

"I think, Dan," Nick began at once, "that it is about time that you undertook to work up a case."

Dan's eyes glowed with interest.

He had been longing for an opportunity to try his hand at actual detective work.

"In a big city like New York," continued Nick, "there is always plenty for a detective to do.

"What kind of a case would you like to begin on?"

"Why!" answered Dan, with some surprise, "I didn't suppose that a detective had any choice about that.

"I thought he had to take whatever case came along."

"So it is in a general way when a man is once in business, but you are learning, you know, and I would like to see what sort of thing it is that your mind turns to naturally."

Dan thought a moment and then said, with a little hesitation:

"I would be glad to tackle anything that you would set me to, but if I were to make a choice I think I would like to try for that thousand dollars that my paper offers as a reward in the Johnson case."

"Are you aware," asked Nick, "that arson is about the most difficult crime to uncover?"

"Yes," replied Dan, "and perhaps I am aiming too high——"

"No, no, you can never aim too high, my boy; I asked the question simply to see whether you realized what a difficult job you were going to undertake."

"I should like to try it if you have no objection," said Dan.

"Objection? Not in the least."

"Shall I begin at once?"

"The sooner the better."

Dan rose to go, but Nick asked him to wait.

"Let me into your theory before you go, Dan," he said.

"My theory may be all wrong and absurd," Dan answered, with a slight flush.

"All the more reason why you should talk it over with me. It would not sur-

prise me if your theory was a good one, for I believe you did some reporting on that case, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then that would make you more familiar with the facts than most others.

"I am not particularly familiar myself with them, for I have paid but little attention to the case. Suppose you tell me about it."

"Shall I tell you about it just as if was all new to you?"

"Exactly."

"Well, then," said Dan, "right in the very heart of the town there is a dwelling house that was put up more than a hundred years ago.

"It is surrounded entirely by modern buildings, and many a man has tried to buy this old house for the purpose of destroying it and putting up a bigger one on its site.

"This has never been done because the owners are landpoor.

"They own one of the most valuable sites in the city, but have no capital with which to make it useful to themselves.

"Besides that, they have had the big head about the value of the place, and have held it at a price away above what anybody would pay for it."

"There are plenty of such instances in New York," Nick remarked.

"The house was occupied," continued Dan, "by Malcolm Johnson, a very old man, who is a relative of the owners.

"It is understood that he lived there simply as a caretaker."

"Did he live there alone?"

"Absolutely; he did the work of the house himself and went out to the restaurants for his meals.

"It was about two weeks ago that the house was discovered to be on fire.

"It was in the night, and although the department responded with its usual promptness, the flames had gained so much headway that the building was gutted before the fire was put out.

"I was on late duty that night and was assigned by my city editor to report the fire."

"You were on the spot then while the fire was still burning?"

"Yes, sir, I saw the rescue of old man Johnson."

"I believe he was pretty badly burned, wasn't he?" asked Nick.

"Terribly, sir. It is a wonder, considering how old he is, that he has survived.

"He is still in the hospital, and in a very serious condition. He may die at any moment."

"Was it plain from the start," asked Nick, "that the fire was incendiary?"

"Oh, yes; we reporters were satisfied of that while the fire was still in progress, for the fumes of kerosene oil were very dense.

"There seemed to be no doubt that somebody had set kindlings in the back of the house and saturated the floors and walls there with oil before setting the stuff off with a match."

"Did the fire department make any investigation?"

"Certainly; but it resulted in nothing.

"Old man Johnson could give no clew to the matter, and, so far as the reporters have been able to learn, the fire department found none."

"There must have been a motive for the crime," said Nick, thoughtfully.

"Of course there was, and that's just what I've been bothering my head about ever since the fire occurred."

"Well, let's hear what you've been thinking."

"You will remember," responded Dan, "that a good many efforts have been made to buy the Johnson house, as it is called, and that these efforts failed simply because the owners wouldn't sell.

"Now, that fact was jumped on by the

editor of my paper; he didn't dare to print what he thought about it, but I know what his theory was, and I will give it to you."

"Do so."

"He believed that this fire was set by some man who is anxious to have the building destroyed in the hope that he could induce the owners to sell the land at a reasonable figure."

"That's a startling theory," said Nick; "it doesn't seem quite reasonable that a man who is rich enough to put up a big building should commit such a crime as that.

"However, all things are possible, and no detective ever scorns a theory just because it seems to be startling."

"Well," said Dan, slowly, "I don't scorn my editor's theory, but I don't take any stock in it, just the same."

"So? Well, then, you must have a theory of your own."

"I have."

"What is it?"

"Before I tell you I will just wind up what I was going to say about my editor.

"He didn't dare to publish his suspicions, for that might have brought him into a big libel suit.

"But he believed in his theory so strongly that he decided to offer this reward of a thousand dollars for the conviction of the man who set the fire.

"The offering of the reward is a good thing for the paper, don't you know, and it keeps things stirred up."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, as I said, I don't take any stock in the theory.

"I've thought it over and have remembered a good many stories of treasure that was concealed in old houses."

Nick looked at his pupil with a good deal of interest.

"I can't quite see why the Johnson family should be so poor,' continued Dan; "I've looked up their history and know that less than one hundred years ago the Johnsons were very wealthy.

"They were counted as among the richest people in New York at the time of the war of 1812."

"Ah!" said Nick; "and at that time when American seaports were threatened with bombardment and capture by the British, many of the wealthy citizens buried their money and plate."

"You've hit my idea right on the head," Dan responded.

"It seems to me that that fire might have been set by somebody who hoped to destroy the building and thus get a chance to explore the ruins and find the treasure that the Johnson family hid and somehow lost track of early in the century. Such things have happened, you know."

"Oh, yes, plenty of them, and it's not a bad theory, Dan; but how will you go to work to follow it up?"

"I feel as if I had already got a start."

"Indeed!"

"You see, I've reported that matter for my paper every day; I've already written something to-day for to-morrow's paper about the reward and about the fruitless efforts of the fire department to get any clew.

"This reporting work has given me an opportunity every day to spend some time near the ruined house.

"Twice I've seen a man there whose face is familiar to me; at first I couldn't think who he was, but I've since remembered."

"Well?"

"He is one of three men who invested some money several months ago in an effort to hunt for Captain Kidd's treasure."

Nick laughed.

"I wonder," he said, "when men will stop hunting for the treasure that Captain Kidd is supposed to have buried."

"I don't think they will stop until the treasure is found," responded Dan.

"I reported the proceedings of those three men, writing quite an article about their efforts to uncover a sunken ship off the Long Island coast.

"Of course they failed and I never thought of them since until I saw one of them loafing about the Johnson house.

"Now, it strikes me as being a good plan to get leave of absence from the paper, get on the track of that man and follow him up."

Nick thought a moment.

"You may be right and you may be wrong," he said, presently; "but the theory is a good one and it ought to be followed.

"Go ahead, Dan, and if you find it leads to anything you have simply taken your first step in the investigation, and if it fails, you will simply have had one of the ordinary experiences of detective work."

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## CHAPTER II.

### DAN ON THE WATCH.

"What's the first thing you're going to do, Dan?" asked Nick, as the boy was about to leave the room.

"I'm going to get my editor to stop publishing the announcement of the reward."

"Why?"

"Because that keeps a lot of men prowling around the Johnson house and so prevents the treasure-hunters, if my theory is correct, from getting in their work."

"That's a good idea, go ahead."

Accordingly Dan laid the matter before the editor of the newspaper on which he was employed, and after some argument succeeded in getting an apparent withdrawal of the reward.

He also obtained the leave of absence that he desired, and that same night he spent most of the time in the vicinity of the Johnson house, but found nothing to reward his effort.

Next day he engaged desk room in a building where he could keep his eyes on the house, and sat in a window watching it from morning until evening.

Once during the day he saw the man whom he remembered as one of the hunters for the Kidd treasure, passing the ruined house and looking curiously at it.

Dan hurried into the street, but by the time he had reached there his man had disappeared.

He felt some chagrin at thus losing track of his prey, but this did not discourage him, for he was quite convinced that if there was anything in his theory operations would have to be conducted at night.

Accordingly when night came Dan slipped into the ruined house and took up his position in one of the ground floor rooms where he could keep his eyes upon the open doorway.

An electric light in the street nearby threw its rays full upon that door so that Dan believed he would be able to recogniz anybody who might enter.

The long evening dragged by with nothing to relieve the monotony.

As the house stood in the business part of the city there was little passing at night, and almost the only footsteps he heard were those of the policeman on that beat.

Along toward midnight he heard unsteady steps approaching and the voices of two men. It was as plain as anything could be that one of these men was very drunk; the other apparently was trying to steady him home.

"Lemme sit down here," he heard one of the men say, thickly.

"No, no, not in the street, my friend," returned the other, encouragingly, "we're almost to the hotel I told you about

where I will see that you will get a good bed."

The staggering steps continued, and Dan wondered what hotel could be referred to; he could not remember any within several blocks of this place.

He had no idea of giving the matter further thought, however, when suddenly he became aware that the men were coming up the short walk that led from the sidewalk to the Johnson house; the boy was on the alert at once.

His experience as a reporter had made him familiar with the rougher side of life in the city, and he quickly jumped to the conclusion that there was crooked business going on.

"It's just possible," he thought, "that the sober man is tired of lugging his friend along and will lay him down here to let him sleep off his drunk, but it's dollars to doughnuts that the sober man is working some kind of a confidence racket."

Dan squeezed himself further into the corner where he stood so that he could not possibly be seen. The next moment the pair of strangers had stepped within the doorway; Dan caught a good view of their faces as they did so, but recognied neither.

Once within the doorway they paused a moment as if hesitating which way to turn.

"Where's ze ni' clerk?" babbled the drunken man; "guess he's gone t' bed."

"It's all right, friend," said the other. "Anyway, this is my room and you shall sleep on my bed. Come on."

Saying this, he led the drunken man into the room where Dan was waiting.

"Y-o-w," yawned the drunken man, stretching his arms widely; this effort caused him to lose his balance and as his guide had let go he fell upon the floor in a heap.

"Where's the bed?" he asked, thickly.

"Never mind," replied the other, "lie there a minute, and I'll fix it."

"All ri'."

The guide did not stir, and in less than half a minute the drunken man was sound asleep. Then the man who had acted as guide stooped and went through his pockets and took from them every article that was of any possible value. Dan was quivering with excitement. He waited until the robbery was done completely, and then leaped from his corner.

The guide started up in alarm. Dan's fist caught him fairly under the jaw and the blow sent him to the other corner of the room in a heap; Dan was upon him instantly and before the thief could imagine what had happened, his hands were caught together and clasped in bracelets.

In starting his pupil out on his detective career Nick had provided him with a complete outfit on the ground that he should be prepared for emergencies; the emergency had come before he had expected, and Dan had met it well.

He felt triumphant over the little adventure, but his mind was still upon his larger task, and so he made all possible haste in getting his prisoner to the nearest police station.

It was easy enough to manage the thief, but the drunken man was quite a problem; he was so sound asleep that it was only with the greatest difficulty that he was awakened sufficiently to walk.

Dan managed it at last, and in the course of half an hour had landed both men in cells. Then, having explained the matter to the sergeant in charge, he set out again for Johnson's house.

A clock in a distant church steeple was striking twelve when he turned into the street on which the house stood. Thinking that possibly the treasure hunters about whom he had theorized might be somewhere in the neighborhood waiting for a chance to enter the house when nobody was on the street, Dan went softly

along in the shadow of the buildings opposite in order not to attract attention if anybody was looking.

The street appeared to be entirely deserted. When he came opposite the Johnson house and halted for a moment in a dark doorway from which he could look up and down in both directions, there was not even a policeman in sight. After he was satisfied with this he ran lightly across the road and noiselessly entered the open door.

He was about to return to the corner where he had passed the first part of the evening when he heard something that sounded like a footfall upon the floor overhead.

He stepped into the shadow of a doorway to one of the rooms and listened intently.

Another sound came to him. It was a light shuffling noise as if somebody was moving softly over the floor. Dan's heart beat fast, but his head was cool; it seemed certain that somebody had entered the building during his trip to the police station with his prisoners.

"And yet it may be a stray cat," thought Dan.

As he stood there he heard the noise repeated from time to time; whatever it was it would have to be investigated.

He crept cautiously to the stairs and step by step made his way upward.

It was necessary to use the utmost care for the stairs was grimy with dust and cinders that would have crunched beneath his feet loudly if he had walked in a natural way.

He got at last so far up that his head was above the level of the second floor.

A few feet in front of him he saw a thin line of bright light.

It came from beneath a closed door and it showed beyond doubt that somebody was in the room beyond at work with a lamp or a lantern.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MAN WITH THE BIG NOSE.

"Then I felt dead sore on my luck," said Dan, at a later time when he was reporting the matter to Nick Carter.

The trouble was that the man at work in the upper room had entered the building, doubtless, while Dan was on his way to the police station with his prisoners.

He had thought at first that it was a very good thing to have that extra adventure, but now he saw that it interfered seriously with his main scheme.

If he had been able to stay quietly in the lower room he could have seen the man enter who was now at work on the second floor; then it struck Dan that perhaps this man had entered by a rear doorway, in which case the detective would have been no better off than he was now.

In any case the next step was to get a sight of the man and see what he was doing.

Dan put his eyes close to the edge of the floor and looked across at the line of light beneath the door.

He could see nothing more than when he stood upright.

There was just enough space between the door and the threshold to allow for the thin line of light to pass through, but not enough to see what was going on beyond.

It would have been a simple matter, of course, for the young detective to creep up to the door, throw it open suddenly and catch the man in the middle of his operations; but he didn't have to spend any time reasoning about it to see that that was the one thing he ought not to do.

If his theory was correct, this man had come to the house at night to search for hidden treasure, and even if he should be discovered in the very act of taking valuables away from the house that would

not be evidence that he had set the place on fire.

To discover the treasure hunter at work was, therefore, only the first step in Dan's investigation.

Accordingly Dan thought over the plan of the house, trying to find some way in which he could look into that room without attracting attention.

His work as a reporter had made him very familiar with the place, and he was not long in recalling that there was a door between the room where the man was at work and another room opening on the hall; above this door was a transom.

As the room in front was entirely dark, it would be possible for the detective to look over this transom into the backroom without being observed, provided he could find something in the front room to stand on.

There was also a chance that the door between the two rooms might be open, in which case he could look through without having to bother about the transom.

"The first thing anyway," thought Dan, "is to get into the front room."

With this plan in mind he cautiously mounted the rest of the stairs and presently stood on the second landing.

He was still taking all the pains he could to keep from making any noise, but just as he was about to turn down the hall toward the front of the house, he was startled by a loud creaking.

He supposed that he had stepped upon a loose plank.

This seemed all the more likely when the line of light beneath the door disappeared suddenly, and the low sounds of working in the back room ceased.

The man in there evidently had taken alarm.

For half a second Dan stood perfectly still, prepared to defend himself if the man in the room should come out to see what had happened.

Then he decided that it would be safer to proceed further along the hall and slip into some other doorway, if possible.

Accordingly he stepped forward and found, to his relief, that his feet made no noise whatever.

He had taken a few stealthy paces thus when he paused and looked back at the door where he had seen the line of light.

He was somewhat surprised to see that the light was there as before, and at the same time he heard sounds that showed that the mysterious work had been resumed.

As he was satisfied that the worker had got over his alarm, Dan went still further along the hall and was just turning into the front room when he heard another loud creak.

This time it was more than the squeaking of a loose plank.

It seemed as if boards were being ripped apart, and he knew, too, that the sounds didn't come from beneath his feet.

There was no question this time that the sound came from the room where the man was at work.

Dan concluded that the first creaking sound had come from there also.

The man evidently had been startled by the noise he made himself, and had put out the light and listened in fear that somebody might be watching in the house who would hear the noise and come up to see what was going on.

"He seems to think everything is all right," thought Dan, "for he is keeping at the work now without minding the noise he makes."

A glance into the front room showed Dan that the door between it and the back room was closed.

The light from the worker's lantern showed clear upon the transom, however, and it seemed, at first, as if it would be a simple thing to climb upon something and look through.

A little light came into the front room

from the street lamps outside, and as Dan's eyes were now accustomed to the darkness this was sufficient to show him that there was nothing whatever in the room upon which he could stand.

All the furniture had been removed from the house at the time of the fire, and it looked for a moment, therefore, as if the young detective could get no further in his investigation.

But Dan was ingenious.

The noise in the back room continued so steadily that it was perfectly certain that the man at work there was confident that nobody was anywhere near to interrupt him, and Dan didn't feel it as necessary to move slowly as he had before.

He withdrew to the hall again, crossed and entered another room.

This room had been badly wrecked at the time of the fire because the firemen had used their axes in chopping away a portion of the ceiling.

There were a number of long sticks that had been splintered from planks lying about, and best of all, there was a wreck of a low chair there; it had been so badly damaged that no one had thought it worth saving.

Dan discovered these things by flashing his pocket lamp upon the scene.

He would not have dared to use the lamp at the other side of the house, but here he believed it could be done with safety.

He kept the slide open but a moment, however, or until he had selected a stick about three feet long.

With this and the broken chair he returned to the front room on the other side of the house.

As he entered it he heard again a loud, ripping, creaking sound, and as he thought of what it must mean he felt that his theory of the case was justified.

Working quickly as if there were no danger of his being discovered, he placed the broken chair upon the floor beneath the transom and stood upon it.

It was not tall enough to bring his head within two feet of the transom, but he had counted on that and was not in the least discouraged.

Taking his pocket knife he split open one end of the stick he had brought for a few inches.

Then he took a small hand mirror which Nick had given him as a part of his outfit and thrust the handle into the slit at the end of the stick.

He worked at it a moment until the mirror was firmly fastened and then raised it carefully to the edge of the transom.

Immediately he saw a reflection of a part of the room beyond.

It was not the part he wanted to see, for it didn't show the presence of anybody at work there.

He moved the mirror this way and that until at length he got a glimpse of a man's back; then he got down and moved the chair a foot or two to one side.

Mounting it again and raising the mirror, he found that he could lean it against one edge of the transom in such a way that the reflection gave him an almost complete view of the spot where the man was at work.

It proved from this, as Dan had theorized, that the man had been prying away the mop board upon one side of the room.

At the moment when Dan got the scene well in view, the man, whose back was to the detective, was pushing a chisel in behind one end of the mopboard and giving it a violent pull outward.

This caused another of those creaking sounds that at first had led Dan to suppose that he had stepped upon a loose plank.

This operation appeared to be the last that was necessary for loosening the plank, for the man laid down the chisel, put both hands to the board, and exerting

all his force, wrenched it away from the wall.

The nails which held it gave way so suddenly that he sat back on the floor with considerable force.

This apparently alarmed him, for he lay over quickly on his side, reached for the dark lantern, which sat on the floor near him, and closed the slide.

Then for a moment there was absolute silence in the ruined house.

The worker had evidently taken alarm again lest somebody might be near and hear his movements.

Dan lowered the mirror from the transom at that moment, thinking it possible that when the worker opened the slide of his lantern again he would look in that direction and then see the shining surface of the mirror.

That, of course, would have caused him to be suspicious, and he might have made an investigation that would have blocked Dan's plans completely.

Whether the man did look up at the transom when he reopened his lantern Dan could not tell, but after a moment the light glowed again and there was a rustling movement to show that the worker was picking himself up.

Up went the mirror again, and Dan saw the worker running his hand into the openings between the joists upon which the mopboard had been nailed.

"Treasure-hunting, and no mistake," thought the young detective, triumphantly.

It bothered him a good deal that the man worked in such a way that his back was continually toward him.

It seemed likely, however, that before long he would turn and thus give the detective a view of his face.

"I should know his shape, anyway," thought Dan, "and at the worst I could spot him when I shadow him from the house."

The worker kept on thrusting his hand into all the openings until he had gone the entire length that had been covered by the mopboard; then he drew a long breath, evidently to express his disappointment, and looked around the room.

It was plain enough that he had not found what he was looking for and that he would have to begin again.

Presently he took his lantern in his hand and began to go around the sides of the room on his hands and knees, looking at the edge of the mopboard as he went.

Dan was able to follow his movements perfectly by tilting his mirror a little to one side or the other.

In the course of this journey the man brought his face into view.

It seemed to be a familiar face to Dan, and yet he could not place it.

This fact bothered the young detective badly, for the worker had such a very large nose that it seemed to Dan that if he had once seen it he ought to recognize it instantly.

He could not for the life of him think of anybody he had ever seen with that kind of a nose, and yet he was certain that somewhere he had met this man.

After a time Big-nose halted and put his fingers along the edge of the mopboard where it ran beneath the window. The reflection in the mirror made it plain that at that point the mopboard was a little loose.

The haste with which Big-nose set his lantern on the floor and began to work with the chisel, plainly showed that this spot must have been the one which he had set out to find when he first began his operations.

He was evidently a good deal excited now, for he worked fast and without any apparent effort to be quiet about it.

The board ripped and creaked as he forced it away from the joists.

Before very long he had got one end entirely loose, and without waiting to rip

away the entire board, he thrust his fingers in, and, after feeling a moment, withdrew an envelope from which he took a sheet of paper.

In the mirror this looked like a piece of ordinary letter paper with a message on it.

Big-nose sat on the floor and read what was written there, from beginning to end.

Then he drew another long breath, and this time it seemed as if it were one of satisfaction.

The paper had been folded twice when he drew it out, and he now refolded it. Then he returned it to the envelope and thrust it into his pocket.

Dan took particular pains to notice which pocket that envelope went into.

The next thing Big-nose did was to push the partly-removed mopboard back into place.

It was difficult to do this without pounding, but he managed it pretty well by sitting on the floor and pushing his feet hard against the plank.

He finally got it so far back that an ordinary observer would not have noticed that it had been removed.

When this was done he went to plank that had been pulled entirely away and replaced that in the same fashion.

After that he put his tools in various pockets, closed the slide of his lantern, and left the room by the door underneath which Dan had seen the line of the light.

The detective promptly put aside his mirror and prepared to follow.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ALL-NIGHT DIVE.

The man with the big nose did not go down by the front stairway. Instead, he turned to the back of the house where there was a stairway that had been made for the use of servants.

The fire had damaged this so badly that it was only by using the greatest care that the man could get down.

He seemed to know his way, and this fact made it all the more certain to Dan that the treasure-hunter was the man who had set the fire.

The investigation by the fire department had shown that the flames started in the back of the house, and it was this fact that had caused the servant's stairway to be so badly damaged.

Dan himself had examined this back stairway carefully, and had made up his mind that nobody who knew the place at all would try to use it.

He saw his mistake when he heard Big-nose going slowly and safely down, and he realized that he had lost nothing by the adventure that took him to the police-station.

It was plain enough that the treasure hunter had entered the house from the rear.

The young detective felt very doubtful as to whether he could get down the back stairs in the dark without making a fatal misstep. He had no fear of getting hurt by any such accident, but he was exceedingly anxious not to let Big-nose suspect that he was being followed.

There seemed to be no doubt that the treasure hunter would make his way from the building by the back entrance, and, therefore, if Dan should go down and wait for him at the front door he would lose his man.

Nevertheless, Dan would not risk going down the broken back stairs in the dark. So he went as quickly as he could without making a noise about it, down the front stairs and around through the empty rooms to the kitchen at the back.

He arrived there just as the treasure hunter entered the kitchen from the back stairs.

Dan stood perfectly still, for he was within a dozen feet of his man, and if it

had been daylight they would have been in full view of each other.

The treasure hunter himself stood still also. Possibly he had heard Dan moving around in the other rooms.

"If he should flash his lantern on me now," thought Dan, "the game would be up, unless I could make him believe that I am a sneak thief.

"That's the game I'll put up if he catches me."

The treasure hunter did not flash his lantern, but after waiting a moment, moved on tiptoe across the kitchen floor and opened a door that led out to a small yard in the rear.

He closed the door behind him, but Dan was quickly at a window; the night was not so dark as to conceal the treasure hunter completely, and Dan saw his form going over a high fence.

The moment his man disappeared upon the other side, and opened the kitchen door and went out also.

The fence was higher than his head, but after his training in Nick's gymnasium it was a simple thing for him to grasp the top of it and pull himself up until he could look over.

He knew already what there was beyond the fence, for in his previous examination of the house he had made himself familiar with the entire neighborhood.

On the other side there was a yard very much like the one he was in. The further side of this yard was bounded by the rear wall of a building that fronted upon another street.

That building was occupied by a lot of small business concerns, and so far as Dan knew, nobody occupied it at night.

The moment he got his eyes up to the top of the fence he heard the clicking of a latch; the yard into which he looked was entirely empty.

He knew, therefore, that his man had opened a door in the building opposite.

There was a window on each side of that door and it struck the young detective that his man might place himself in one of these windows for the purpose of making sure whether he were being followed.

If he did that and Dan should climb the fence, the whole plan of investigation would be smashed.

The young detective remembered that the ground floor of that building was occupied by a plumber. It did not seem at all likely therefore that the place was used as a resort for thieves.

In other words, it was fairly certain that the man with the big nose had somehow obtained keys to the plumber's doors and was using the place simply as a passage to the next street.

Dan was thinking quickly, and wondering a little what Nick Carter would do under the circumstances.

"If the plumber's place," his thoughts ran, "is really a cover for criminals, I can get in there at any time and find the proof that I need.

"If it isn't, my man will simply walk through to the other street, and then go to his home or the place where he intends to meet his partners, if he has any.

"That being the case, I'd better scoot around to the other street and meet him than risk his seeing me when I climb the fence.

"I should know him anyway wherever I find him; I know no man with a nose like that can disguise himself so that I can't recognize him."

Dan reached this conclusion so quickly that the door had hardly clicked before he had dropped from the fence and started back through the ruined house.

He felt that there was no reason why he should proceed cautiously now, and so he tore through the ground floor hall at full speed.

Just as he went out of the door he caught a glimpse of a man dodging into

the darkness of the buildings on the other side of the street.

It looked as if this man had either hurried away from the building, when he heard Dan racing through, or as if he had been crossing the street to enter it.

In either case, it was plain that he had taken alarm at the detective's appearance and was running away.

For about half a second Dan felt confused; he was tempted to run after this new man on the suspicion that he was in some way connected with the one who had been at work at the mopboards.

Then he thought that this would hardly do, for if he should take time to pursue the new man he would lose all chance of getting on the track of the first.

There was no telling but that the new man might be simply a tramp, who had thought of entering the building for the purpose of sleeping there, and in any case it was by no means certain that he had anything to do with the treasure hunter.

If Dan could have known who that second man was, and what he was there for he might have—but Dan did not know, and recovering from his confusion quickly, he went on as he had intended to.

He ran with all speed to the street corner and around it until he came to the corner of the street on which the plumber's office opened.

There he slackened his speed, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, slouched down toward the plumber's as if he were the toughest kind of a loafer prowling around the street because he had no home to go to.

What he saw, led him to believe that he had done exactly the right thing. A man was crossing the street at some distance ahead of him, and the direction he was taking made it almost certain that he had just come out of the plumber's office.

The street was not very well lighted and at that distance Dan could not recognize the man as the one who had been working at the mopboards.

He believed he was the right man and proceeded to shadow the man in the way that Nick had taught him.

This proved to be a simple enough matter, for when the man reached the opposite sidewalk he turned about and went in the same direction that Dan was going.

He never looked behind him and apparently did not know that anybody else was upon the street.

Then for a long distance Dan kept up the chase, never losing sight of his man until he saw him cross a street and approach the basement door of a saloon not far from the East river.

The young detective quickly reasoned that the man was approaching a tough resort, one of those places that is open all night for those who know how to get in.

Accordingly he hastened his steps and managed to slip into a dark doorway near the saloon just as his man paused there.

Then for the first time the young detective got a glimpse of the man's face.

He felt as if he been thrown down.

He recognized this man and knew him to be one of the Captain Kidd treasure hunters about whom he had spoken to Nick; but this treasure hunter had a nose like other people.

It was not large, and nothing like the nose that Dan had seen in the mirror. Dan felt pretty bad about it.

But he was not wholly discouraged.

"There's something here that I haven't dropped to," he reflected; "the fact that this Kidd treasure hunter flashed up near the Johnson house is in line with my theory of the case.

"Perhaps he was waiting in the plumber's shop for the man with the big nose to get through with his operations; in that case he has got the paper that Bignose found.

"Maybe I've been thrown off the scent entirely, but it seems to me as if the only thing I can do now is to keep this man in view, or else chuck the whole case, and that I've no idea of doing just yet."

While he was thinking in this way Dan heard the man give five short raps upon the door, which was opened almost immediately.

He passed inside and the door was closed and locked.

Dan made up his mind that he could get into that dive, but he believed that it would cause suspicion if he should try to enter at once; so he allowed a few minutes to pass before he approached the door and gave five raps upon it.

It was opened as promptly as before, but not wide enough to allow him to enter. A tough-looking man stood there and glared at Dan.

The latter was breathing hard as if he had just stopped from a long run.

"What do you want?" asked the man, gruffly.

"Want to take a sneak, of course," replied Dan.

"Chase yourself, then," and the man began to close the door.

"Ah, say," exclaimed Dan, "youse won't go for to let a fellow get nailed, would youse?"

"I ain't a-goin' to have my place pulled for a bloke that can't take care of himself," returned the man.

He didn't close the door, however, but kept it open about an inch, looking at the young fellow sharply.

"Yuse won't get pulled," returned Dan, confidently, "dere ain't no cops givin' me de chase now, but if I run up against one he'll take me in.

"Dey don't know where I am now, and if I only duck me head till morning I'll be hunky, see?"

"What you been doin'?"

"'Sh!" responded Dan, with a frightened glance around him.

Then he bent his head forward and whispered:

"I cracked a till in a butcher's shop uptown, that's straight. "Give a fellow a chance, won't youse?"

The man looked doubtful for an instant, and putting his head out of the door looked up and down the street; there was nobody in sight.

"Come in," he said, abruptly, throwing the door wide open and stepping aside.

Dan entered and door was closed immediately. He was then in perfect darkness, but only for a moment.

The doorkeeper, having turned the key, opened another door and Dan saw before him a long, low room lighted by two or three dirty lamps and half filled with a tough-looking crowd.

Some were seated at tables, drinking and conversing in low tones; others were sprawled out upon benches and on the floor asleep.

Over in one corner was a small bar.

Dan's quick eyes took in the fact that the man whom he recognized as the Kidd treasure hunter was sitting alone at a table near the far end of the room.

There was another thing that attracted his attention in the same glance; this man had on, apparently the same kind of clothes that had been worn by the man who was prying away the mopboards.

"I guess I'm beginning to tumble," thought Dan, as he slouched across the room and took a chair near the treasure hunter.

The latter glanced at him carelessly, but gave no sign of recognition or surprise.

Dan promptly called for beer, and for the next minute or two appeared to be very busy with his drink.

A number of those who were awake had looked up at him as he entered, but after giving him a glance they paid no further attention to him.

Dan saw that the treasure-hunter sat in such a way that the left pocket of his short coat could easily be reached, unless he should happen to move his arm which was resting on the table.

"It was in the left pocket of his coat," thought Dan, "that the man with the big nose put the paper he found behind the mopboard."

Dan edged his chair a little nearer without attracting any attention; then while pretending to snooze he watched for an opportunity.

It came in a moment when there was another signal at the front door. Everybody glanced that way excepting the treasure-hunter.

Dan quickly reached out his hand and thrust it into the treasure-hunter's pocket. He had to act quickly, for there was less than a second before heads began to be turned his way again.

His fingers closed over something that seemed like a piece of paper and he withdrew it.

The treasure hunter had not suspected the theft; nobody in the room had seen the operation.

Dan felt the thing in the palm of his hand without daring to look at it for a moment, and made up his mind that he had not got what he was after.

He could not make out what it was, but it was certainly not an envelope. Presently he shifted about in his chair a little and glanced down at his hand.

What he held there proved to him that he had not been mistaken in following the Kidd treasure-hunter into this place.

The thing he had taken from the man's pocket was a false nose. He knew therefore that this was the man that had been at work at the mopboards, and he understood now why it was that his face had seemed so familiar.

"When he wore the nose it queered me," thought Dan, "but now I'm onto him, and the next chance I get I'll pick his pocket again and I'll get that envelope with the paper in it, or know the reason why."

## CHAPTER V.

### DAN AS A PICKPOCKET.

Meantime a new customer had entered the place. It was the one whose rapping had attracted the attention of the loungers, causing them to turn their heads an instant and thus giving Dan his chance to pick the treasure hunter's pocket.

The new customer was apparently not known to any of those in the place, for no one spoke to him or gave him more than a curious glance.

Like the others, Dan glanced at him as he walked up the room, and thought he had never seen a tougher specimen in his life.

The man's cheek and chin were dark with a week's beard, his eyebrows were heavy, and the color of his nose told of too much drink and too little food.

His clothes were ragged and dirty.

He didn't seem to be a tramp; there was too much independence in the way he moved about for that. He acted as if he wore ragged clothes because he liked to and not because he had no others.

He found a chair near Dan, dropped into it and in a gruff, husky voice called:

"Set 'em up, barkeep."

"What'll you have?" asked the barkeeper.

"Whisky, of course."

The barkeeper started around with a bottle and glass and the newcomer turning to Dan said:

"Jine me, young fellow?"

"Nixy," Dan answered, "one's enough."

"One what?" demanded the other.

"One ball."

The newcomer stared at Dan for an instant, then grunted, shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"I wish he had sat somewhere else," thought Dan; "he looks like a quarrelsome fellow, and in any case if he keeps his eyes on me he'll interfere with my work."

For a minute or two the newcomer didn't look in Dan's direction, but the boy dared not make another attempt to pick the treasure hunter's pocket, for to be caught at that operation would mean the end of the case, so far as he was concerned.

He waited patiently, hoping that the newcomer would take another seat, or that something else would happen to attract his attention.

Before Dan had made up his mind to try again for the paper that the treasure hunter had found, the door at the back of the saloon opened and a man entered.

The young detective recognized him at once as another of the Kidd treasure hunters, about whom he had written when he was a reporter.

Dan remembered that his name was Barber; the name of the other, that is the one who had been at work in the ruined house, he had never learned.

He was not long in learning it now, for Barber went straight to the table where the man who had worn the big nose sat, and said:

"Well, Kemp, what luck?"

"I thought you'd never come," growled Kemp, in reply.

"Well, I didn't expect you so early."

"Did you s'pose I was going to take all night at it?"

"I didn't know but you might."

"Well, I didn't, understand?"

"Yes, but you haven't answered my question."

"What did you ask me?"

"Don't be grouty, Kemp, you know well enough what I asked you."

"Well, if, you'd come here sooner I'd have told you."

Barber looked at Kemp with a queer smile.

"Guess you're dry," he said.

"I'm dead tired of waiting," Kemp responded.

Barber attracted the barkeeper's attention by knocking on the table.

"What'll be, gents?" asked the barkeeper from his place.

Kemp and Barber both called for whisky, which was soon placed before them.

Barber paid, and when Kemp had gulped down his drink he said:

"Now, I feel better."

"Well, then, what luck did you have?"

"I found it."

"Straight goods?"

"Straight."

"Then we're all right."

"I reckon so."

"Have you got it with you?"

"Where else would I have it?"

Barber gave a low laugh:

"I didn't know but you'd burn it," he said.

"Huh," retorted Kemp, scornfully, "you can burn it yourself if you want to. Here it is——"

With this, he put his hand into the pocket that Dan had tried to pick and withdrew just what the young detective was so anxious to get.

While appearing to be half asleep, Dan could see that the envelope was one that had been used. The edges of the end were torn, showing that somebody had received it and opened it.

Dan wished that he could reach out his hand, snatch away the envelope and put both men under arrest at once.

He would have the courage to do so even though that would have brought all the toughs in the saloon down upon him, but he was old enough to know that such a proceeding would be very unwise.

He was not yet certain that the paper

Kemp was handing to Barber was evidence in the case.

So he sat where he was, watching carefully to see what became of the paper.

Barber smiled in a very satisfied way as he took the envleope. He glanced at the handwriting on the outside and smiled again.

"Seems to be all right, doesn't it?" he asked.

"You'll be better satisfied to see what's inside," Kemp replied.

Barber took the paper from the envelope, unfolded it and bent his head over it.

He held the paper just below the edge of the table, so that Dan could not see it.

He read it through, smiling all the time, and at last folded it again and replaced it in the envelope.

"Goin' to burn it?" asked Kemp.

"Well," answered Barber, with a chuckle, "sometime, mebbe; I shouldn't wonder but this will be useful, though."

"You bet it will, if it's handled right."

Barber nodded, and thrust the envelope into the side pocket of his coat.

"Well," thought Dan, "that pocket can be as easily picked as the other one, and I shall have to try for it.

"I wonder how I can get around beside Barber without his suspecting anything."

A chance to do this came almost immediately.

The five-rap signal sounded again at the front door and when it was opened three or four men came in together.

They were evidently looking for a place where they could sit together, and in the most natural way Dan arose to let them take his place.

It was a bit of politeness that is not uncommon even in tough joints, and one of the newcomers thanked him gruffly.

"Don't mention it," Dan responded, as he moved around and sat down where he could easily reach to Barber's pocket.

At first this position seemed to be much better than he had hoped, for all persons in the room were either turned away from him entirely or so busy with their own affairs as not to be likely to notice him.

He intended to lose no time in his risky undertaking, and already got his hand at the very edge of Barber's pocket, when the tough, who had asked him to drink wheeled around in his chair and looked straight at him.

Dan's hand fell to his side instantly.

"Confound the fellow!" he thought. "I wish he'd clear out."

Apparently the tough had not noticed what Dan was about, for he stared a moment, and then turned to the barkeeper and ordered another drink.

At the same time he wheeled about again in his chair, and sat with his back to Dan.

"Much obliged to you," thought the young detective.

He had to wait a moment then before trying again to get at that mysterious paper, for the barkeeper was coming around to serve the new customers, and was facing him.

Meantime Kemp and Barber were continuing their conversation, but with their heads together and in such low tones that Dan could not distinguish a word.

As soon as the barkeeper had got his orders and had turned about Dan again reached forward.

Just at that instant Barber hitched about in his chair and catching his coat with a hand at each side, pulled it more closely about him.

Then he let his arm fall and the elbow came directly across to the pocket.

Dan almost groaned aloud.

Barber's action was the most natural thing in the world.

He had been sitting in one position for a long time and had wearied of it.

In changing his position he had pulled his coat around, possibly with the thought

that there was something of value in his pocket that he wanted to protect.

It is more likely, however, that his action was taken without a thought of the paper that he had received from Kemp.

In any event, there was the pocket as completely protected from the detective's fingers as if the mysterious paper was in a steel safe.

Dan sat back in his chair and wondered despairingly what he should do next.

At any minute Barber and Kemp might leave the place and then, as he would find it impossible to shadow both at the same time, he might lose track of them entirely.

The ragged tough, who had asked Dan to drink, suddenly changed the situation.

He had raised a glass of liquor to his lips and tasted it.

"Hully smoke!" he exclaimed, in an angry tone. "What's dat?"

He raised the glass to his nose, smelled of it, and then threw it upon the floor.

"Here, there," called the barkeeper, "what are you tryin' to do anyway?"

"Dat's for me to ask," responded the tough, jumping up, "what do youse t'ink youse givin' me, anyway?"

"I gave you whiskey," responded the barkeeper.

"Nit, t'ree times nit; it's pizen."

The tough spoke in loud tones and looked savagely at the barkeeper; the latter grew angry also.

"See here," he said, "you've got to shut up here, or get out. I won't have any noise in this place——"

"Youse won't, eh?" howled the tough. "I'm goin' to clean out de hull lay-out. Come on, everybody, if you want a sluggin' match."

All the customers who were awake looked up, while the barkeeper and doortender rushed toward the tough to grapple with him.

The tough didn't wait for them.

He looked down at Kemp and Barber, who were sitting near by, and who, like the rest, were staring at him, and exclaimed:

"Say, youse, if youse don't want me to close yer peepers for youse, look somewhere else; see!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Kemp; "mind your business."

"Hey, what's dat?"

With this the tough shot out his right hand straight at Kemp's head. The latter dodged and the blow missed, but the tough was a lively one.

He brought his other hand round with a swinging stroke, caught Barber's hat with it and knocked it to the other end of the room.

Then he gave Kemp a poke on the shoulder that tumbled him from his chair to the floor.

By this time the barkeeper and the doortender were close upon him and the tough turned to give his attention to them.

They put up their fists in good style, but the quarrelsome customer was too much for them; one after another he beat down their guards, and landed first a right-hander, then a left-hander.

Biff! Biff! went his fists upon their jaws and chest.

They went down before him as if they were made of straw.

The whole place was in an uproar; everybody who was awake jumped up.

Some made for the door, intending to go out, but halted when they found it locked and saw that the doortender had taken away the key.

Others started to the rescue of the bartender. They meant well, but it would have been evident to anybody looking on that the tough knew more about the use of fists in a minute than all together knew in a day.

He made it extremely lively for everybody who came within reach of him; he dodged and warded off blows with wonderful skill and seemed to land his fists when and where he wanted to.

Dan saw little of this scrimmage.

He might have been interested in watching it if his mind had not been occupied with the case he was trying to work up.

The instant the fight broke out he saw that it might give him an opportunity to do what he had hoped to do when he entered the place.

Kemp, as before stated, was knocked to the floor by the quarrelsome customer.

Barber made a wild attempt to save his hat when it went flying from his head.

In doing this both his hands went up into the air, and he rose to his feet.

Dan stood up too, and only waited until the fighting tough had turned about to dispose of the barkeeper and doortender, when he made another effort to get his fingers into Barber's pocket.

He succeeded, but Barber was making such excited efforts to keep out of the fight and to get across the room and rescue his hat that Dan was not able to clutch the envelope he wanted.

A moment later, however, while the row was at its hottest, he saw his chance to try again and this time he succeeded.

There was only one envelope in Barber's pocket, and Dan, therefore, was certain that he had got the right article.

Without glancing at it he thrust it into the inside pocket of his coat and then hastily withdrew to a corner of the room so that he might not get mixed up in the fight.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DAN LOSES A LETTER.

By the time Dan got to his corner, the tough had knocked out most of those who had tried to overcome him, and the others, with the exception of the barkeeper and doortender, were doing their best to get out of his way.

Dan, therefore, saw nothing more than the end of the racket which came about in this way.

The barkeeper and doortender had picked themselves up and made a rush together at the tough, whose back at the moment, was turned to them.

He swung about on his feet with wonderful quickness and landed a blow upon the barkeeper's chest, that knocked the wind out of him, and sent him staggering back against the bar, where he fell.

Apparently without stopping in the least the tough then seized the doortender, catching him by both arms and shaking him violently.

This lasted but a second or two, when the tough got hold of the hand in which the doortender carried the key; an instant later he had wrenched the key away, pushed the doortender over, and gone striding to the door.

He unlocked it, tossed the key on the floor, and shouted:

"Come again, when youse hev learned how to handle yer dukes."

Then he went out and slammed the door after him.

"Confound the fellow," exclaimed the doortender, picking up the key.

"Say!" asked the barkeeper, feebly, "was that Fitzsimmons?"

"Fitzsimmons, no!" replied somebody in disgust; "don't youse know Fitz when you see him?"

"It wasn't a question of seein' that feller," returned the barkeeper, "but of feelin' him."

"He could hit like a sledge hammer," remarked one of the customers, holding a hand to his aching jaw.

"I'm glad he's gone," said another, sitting down again at a table.

"No, youse don't!" exclaimed the doortender; "no more loafing in this place to-night."

"Youse wouldn't turn us out, would youse, Billy?"

"Every mother's son of youse."

"Ah, come now——"

"Clear out. This racket might have been heard ten blocks. If youse want a chance to come in here again you've got to get out now; see!"

Most of the men realized that the doortender meant business and began to go toward the door.

"It all comes of youse lettin' blokes in that ain't known to youse, Billy," growled the barkeeper.

"I t'ort he was on the level," grumbled the doortender; "he spoke easy and it seemed to me I'd seen his mug."

"Guess you looked cross-eyed, Billy."

"Don't go for to string me, dere's too much of a push in this place, anyway. Come, now, get out, everyone of youse."

"Mind youse get out quiet, too," added the barkeeper.

Dan joined the crowd as it made for the door.

He saw that Barber had recovered his hat and that Kemp had picked himself up from the floor.

"The fight was a good thing for me one way," thought Dan, "for it gave me a chance to get this paper, but it's too bad that the crowd's broken up, for Barber and Kemp are likely to separate and I can only follow one of them at a time.

"However, I'll get one anyway, and with one in the cooler it's likely I can find the other."

Just then he saw Barber put his hand in his side pocket and look surprised.

Both Barber and Kemp were at that moment on the way out.

Barber said something to Kemp and turned back.

"Here, there," exclaimed the doortender, stopping him, "dis place ain't open for business no more to-night."

"I know," answered Barber, "but I dropped something back there——"

"Huh, I t'ort it was de fightin' bloke dat did de droppin'."

"Yes, but on the level, Billy, I've lost something and I've got to have it."

"Well, go and look for it, then, but mind youse hurry, see! No tellin' but what a copper mebbe on de way now across de street, lookin' fer to pull de joint."

Dan would have liked an excuse to linger in the dive until Barber and Kemp were ready to go out, but the doortender got him by the shoulder and pushed him along into the crowd.

He couldn't have made any resistance to this without attracting attention and so he said nothing but went out with the others.

As soon as the loafers were once outside they separated quickly, for every one of them knew that it would not be safe to be found in a crowd by a policeman.

Dan crossed the street and stood in a dark doorway where he could easily keep his eyes upon the saloon.

He had but two or three minutes to wait before the door opened and Barber and Kemp came out.

He could recognize them by the fact that the light from within the saloon showed on their faces for just an instant as they were in the doorway.

They didn't hurry away as the others had done, but stood at the curb talking in low tones.

Dan wished that he could hear what they were saying, but no word came to him until at the very end when he heard Kemp remark angrily:

"I know who done it."

Barber then said something to which Kemp responded in the same tone:

"It must have been the kid who came in a little while after me and who sat near us."

"They're wondering what's become of that paper," thought Dan, feeling in his inside pocket to make certain that it was where he had put it.

At that moment the door of the saloon opened again and Billy appeared.

"Say, youse!" he said in any angry undertone, "what are youse loafin' around here for?

"Why don't youse git and give us fellows a chance to hang on to our place?"

"Oh, well, Billy," answered Barber, "we're not in your place now; you told us to get out and we've done it. That's all you can ask."

"Oh, chase yourselves," exclaimed Billy impatiently, "youse know as well as me dat it ain't safe to hang 'round here.

"De collars has it in for us anyhow, and youse'll git us pulled if youse don't look lively."

"Might as well move on, Barber," growled Kemp.

The two started across the road directly toward Dan, and Billy, satisfied that they were on the move, re-entered the saloon and closed the door.

"Do you suppose that young kid was a detective?" asked Barber, when they were half way across the street.

"I didn't think so," Kemp answered, "but I do now."

"How do you suppose he tumbled to us?"

"That's more than I can say right off, but two or three times while I was in the house I thought I heard somebody moving around."

"You ought to have been more careful."

"Pooh! I had to get that paper, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"And I had to take the risk and that's all there is to it.

"I looked back after I was in the plumber's shop to see if I was followed, and I'm sure that I wasn't, but somehow he suspected us——"

Just then, to Dan's great surprise, the doorway in which he had concealed himself became lighted.

A little way down the street there was an electric light on a high pole; as sometimes happens this light had died down for a moment, leaving the street almost dark.

Dan had not noticed it when he hid himself in the doorway, and now it blazed up suddenly and threw its rays fully upon him.

Barber and Kemp were in the act of stepping from the street to the sidewalk when the lamp flared up.

Dan stood perfectly still, hoping that they would not notice him.

It looked as if they didn't, though Barber turned suddenly around so that his back was to Dan, and taking Kemp by the arm, turned him around also.

Then Barber said something in a low voice to Kemp that Dan could not catch.

Kemp replied in the same tone and Dan listened in vain.

At the same time he looked in both directions along the line of buildings to see whether there were any other place he could dodge into while the men had their backs turned to him.

Every other place seemed to be lighter than this one, so he stood where he was, still hoping that they would move on presently without discovering him.

At length Barber said in a tone that Dan could hear:

"Well, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do about it, but it'll go hard with poor Tom."

"Poor Tom," thought Dan, "who the mischief is that? There must be a third man in the scheme. Perhaps it was the one who was running away from the house when I came out to chase Kemp."

"Yes," responded Kemp, with a sigh, "and after all the trouble we went to, too; I'm sorrry for him."

"So am I," said Barber, "but if the detective really got that letter, I don't see how we can help it."

"We certainly can't help Tom any," said Kemp, "and we'll have all we can do to look out for ourselves."

"Right you are, and that being the case we had better take a sneak now, hadn't we?"

"That goes. So long, then."

"So long."

The men turned as if to go in opposite directions.

Dan was trying to make up his mind which of them he would shadow when both wheeled about and leaped directly toward him.

He saw that he was discovered and immediately placed himself against the wall with both hands up to make as good a defence as possible.

The sidewalk was so narrow that they were upon him with one bound, and he had no time to draw a weapon of any kind.

For that matter Nick had advised him to be rather slow in using a revolver.

"A detective," he had said, "should be able to get along with his fists under most circumstances, and only use his revolver when there is absolutely no other way."

Dan had taken this advice as seriously as he had the rest of the great detective's instructions, and, therefore, had not stood with his hand on the butt of his revolver, as he might have done had he been more experienced.

He was a good boxer for his years and weight, and for the first moment or two he made things mighty interesting for his assailants.

Kemp got a crack on his real nose that caused the blood to flow, and Barber gasped and staggered from a blow on his chest.

Both men kept up the attack, however, and fought like fiends.

There was no question at all as to what they were trying to do. They closed with Dan repeatedly, and on every occasion one or both tried to get at his pockets.

Seeing that was what they wished, to get possession of the letter he had taken from them, he fought in such a way as to keep his pockets protected as far as possible.

Without realizing it he put himself in some danger by this move, for he didn't venture to strike out so hard with his left hand as he would if he had not been afraid of giving one of them a chance at the pocket in the left side of his coat.

Even if he had been fighting freely it isn't likely that he could have overcome both of these desperate men.

They were heavier than he, and evi-

dently each had more than the average knowledge of boxing.

For fully half a minute there was a rapid exchange of blows, and Dan was holding his own remarkably well.

He felt as if the victory was his when one of his blows caught Kemp upon the neck and caused him to fall.

He promptly turned his attention to Barber, intending to get in an upper cut that should be a knockout, when his feet were pulled from under him.

Kemp indeed had been knocked down, but not stunned, and the moment he fell he got both arms around Dan's knees and gave them a yank.

As Dan went down he placed both his hands over his left pocket with a desperate intention of protecting that mysterious paper, whatever should happen.

Barber quickly took advantage of his fall and gave him a stunning blow on the temple as he went down.

Dan was not wholly unconscious as the result of this blow, but he was so stunned that he could not stir for a moment.

He was aware that his hands were pulled away from his pocket and that an attempt was made to take out the envelope that he had placed there.

He could not tell whether this attempt succeeded or not, for through it all he tried as best he could to keep the pocket protected.

Dan was half aware of another thing; there was a third man in the fight now.

Who the third man was he could not make out and could not even guess.

Presently he realized that the fight was over and that somebody was bending over him.

That somebody placed his hand upon Dan's heart.

Thinking of the envelope Dan made a great effort to pull himself together; he pushed the man's hand away, and drew his coat tightly about him.

The man immediately stood up and after a glance at the young detective hurried off.

He didn't go far, but having come to a street corner, stood there looking back at Dan as if waiting to see what he would do.

Dan lay still for just a moment and then sat up and rubbed his head. After that he reached his right hand to his inside coat pocket and felt of the articles there.

There had been three or four letters there addressed to himself when he started out; there were now three or four envelopes.

He took them out and held them up one after another to the light of the electric lamp.

All but one of the envelopes was addressed to him and he recognized the handwriting.

One of his letters apparently was missing, but in its place was another addressed in a strange hand to "Thomas Kelly."

"They picked my pocket," thought Dan, "but they've carried off the wrong letter."

This discovery made him feel so good that he stood up at once and began to dust his clothes.

His head whirled a little from the effects of the blow, but with that exception he was in as good condition as usual.

The man who was watching him secretly at the street corner apparently realized that the young detective was in good shape to defend himself, if he should be attacked again, and he turned about quickly and hurried away from the neighborhood.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DAN MEETS TOM KELLY.

Dan looked up and down the street.

Coming slowly around the corner not far away he saw a policeman.

"That cop," he thought, "doesn't look as if he had seen anything since he went on post, but just the same I'll ask him."

Accordingly, Dan went up and met the officer, and having explained that he was on detective business, inquired if he had seen two men hurrying in any direction.

"What did they look like?" asked the policeman.

Dan described Kemp and Barber.

"No. The fact is that I haven't seen anybody in this neighborhood yet," said the policeman.

Dan thanked him politely and was

about to pass on when the officer stopped him:

"Wait a minute," he said. "You've been having a scrap yourself, haven't you?"

"A little one."

"Well, you look like as if you had been run through a picking machine."

"Do I?"

"Yes, and if you hadn't satisfied me that you were connected with Nick Carter I should have run you in as a suspicious character."

"Thanks," said Dan, looking at his hands which he saw were blood-stained.

"I suppose my face looks as bad as that?"

"Worse."

"Then I'd better clean up before I do any more work."

"You had better, if you don't want to get spotted."

Dan thanked the officer again and went to an all-night drug store which was not far away, where he readily got permission to use the back room for the purpose of washing the dirt and blood stains from his face and hands.

He didn't begin this operation until he had examined the paper which he had had such a hard fight for.

He was considerably surprised when he noticed that the letter was addressed in a feminine hand, and a good deal more surprised when he had read it.

It began "Dear Tom," and Dan had read no more than this when he turned to the envelope to compare the handwriting there with that upon the paper.

They were undoubtedly the same.

Then he laid the letter upon the shelf in front of him, and bending over it read:

"Dear Tom: Don't have anything to do with the Johnson House scheme. You have had trouble enough already and if you go and set that house afire you're certain to get caught. It will be the end of everything between us if you do. Think of it, Tom. You've already been in prison on short sentences and if you should get pulled for setting the house afire the judge would have no mercy on you. Let the job alone, Tom, if you want me to be

"Your sweetheart, Nell."

There was no address upon the letter, but at the top there was a date which Dan readily remembered was two days before the Johnson House was burned.

Again he looked at the envelope. It was addressed to Thomas Kelly at a number on Doyer street.

Dan was too surprised at first to take in the full meaning of this letter.

In fact a letter was the last thing he had expected to find.

According to his theory the man, or men, who had set fire to the Johnson house did so for the sake of getting an opportunity to hunt for treasure there.

Kemp had gone there, pried away the mop-boards and found the paper.

Dan had supposed, therefore, that this paper was a key to the hiding place of the treasure.

Instead, here was a letter apparently addressed by a girl to her lover, begging him not to commit a certain crime.

"I feel as if I were looking through a fog," thought Dan, as he turned from the letter and began to wash his face and hands.

After he had cleaned up thoroughly he sat down on a box in the back room of the drug store and read the letter again.

He read it until he could have said it backwards.

He held it up to the light to see if there was any writing somehow concealed between the lines.

He turned it upside down and tried to make sense out of the letters in that position.

It was impossible for a time to give up the idea that this piece of paper was a key to hidden treasure, and he was trying, therefore, to make out that it was a cipher.

"If I could translate the thing," he kept saying to himself, "it would show me just where the Johnsons hid their money and valuables at the time of the war of 1812."

He tried all the schemes he could think of, omitting every third word and then every other word, and then counting off the letters in the separate orders.

There was no way in which he could make any sense out of the document except in the way it appeared to read naturally.

After puzzling in this fashion for a full half hour, in the course of which he used every cipher test that Nick had taught him, he gave it up.

He tried to think what the letter should mean if taken just as it stood.

Kemp had certainly found it behind the mop-board.

How did it come there?

Suddenly Dan remembered a portion of the conversation between Kemp and Barber when they stood on the sidewalk, just in front of him.

"Poor Tom," one of them had said.

At that time Dan had supposed that they were referring to some partner of theirs and had wondered who it could be.

"Tom Kelly," he said to himself now as he looked at the address on the envelope.

Then he glanced at the postmark.

It happened to be a plain one and he saw that the letter had been mailed in Brooklyn on the same day that it was written.

"The letter is straight enough," he said to himself.

"This girl, Nell, whoever she is, knew that her lover, Tom Kelly, was in a job to burn the Johnson house.

"Perhaps she knew it was a scheme to hunt for treasure there after the house had been reduced to ruins.

"Anyhow, she writes to Tom begging him not to go into the scheme.

"Tom carries the letter a couple of days and maybe he was thinking that he would not do the job.

"Maybe he and Kemp and Barber drew lots to decide which one should set it afire.

"Perhaps the lot fell to Tom.

"Anyhow, it looks as if he were the one who did the job.

"Now, it's easy to suppose that having got into the house, which was no difficult matter, seeing that these fellows had got hold of keys to the plumber's shop in the building at the back, Tom may have made up his mind that he would pinch something for himself before he started the blaze.

"Nell speaks of him as having been in prison before; that shows that he is a professional crook.

"All right then. It would be natural for a professional crook to go through the house and get what he could lay hands on before burning it down.

"There was only one man in it and that one too old to be a very dangerous foe if he should wake up.

"So I'm satisfied that Tom in the course of his going through the house came to that room where I saw Kemp at work.

"Something may have happened just then to remind him of the letter that his sweetheart had sent him.

"Perhaps he was filling his pockets full of plunder, but no matter—he thought of the letter and decided that he would not keep it by him any longer.

"He was going to set fire to that part of the house which was under this room.

"It would have been easy enough for him to burn the letter when he touched a match to the kindlings that he had stacked up by the back stairs, but the professional criminal, as Nick says, is all the time doing queer things that give him away.

"I remember that the mop-board, where Kemp worked last and where he found this letter, was already a little loose.

"Tom saw that, too, so he just shoved his letter down into that crack between the mop-board and the wall.

"He believed that when the house burned up the letter would be destroyed.

"Now, then, how's that for a theory?"

When Dan asked himself this question, he held the letter out before him at arm's length and read it again.

He had to admit that his theory was mostly guess-work, and that it might be, and probably was a wrong one in a good many details.

"The main point must be right, though," he continued in his thoughts.

"The firemen worked more quickly and skilfully than Tom Kelly supposed they would, with the result that the house was not entirely burned down.

"The woodwork, in that room where this letter was found, was only scorched.

"It was, therefore, possible that the letter would be found somehow.

"It was almost certain to be found, because sometime or other the house would be torn down—what there was left

of it—and anybody would look at a letter found tucked in behind a mop-board.

"Of course Tom Kelly and the others knew that that room had not been destroyed and that the letter was there, and that it was dangerous to leave it there.

"Nell speaks of this thing as a job.

"That means that more than one man was in it.

"The others were Kemp and Barber.

"If the letter should be found and Tom should be arrested in consequence of it, Barber and Kemp would be in great danger.

"So they decided to get that letter, and whether they were hunting for treasure or not, that was what Kemp went there to find.

"But theory, or no theory this letter connects Tom Kelly with the fire, and it's my business first of all to look him up.

"So that's what I've to do next."

Having come to this conclusion Dan looked at his watch and found to his surprise that most of the night had passed.

Before long it would be sunrise.

Although this man, Kelly, was not likely to be an early riser, Dan believed that no time should be lost in hunting him up.

So he put the letter in his pocket and started for Doyer street.

On the way he thought out a plan for getting some kind of confession from Kelly at the very start.

Dan hoped that he could surprise Kelly into making some admission that would serve as evidence in the case.

He decided that the best plan was to flash the letter upon Kelly before the latter had time to think of denials and explanations.

Therefore Dan had the letter in his hand when he arrived at the Doyer street number written on the envelope.

The building was one of the cheapest of one-room tenement houses. The outer door stood open and Dan entered at once.

A man whom he had not seen because of the darkness of the hallway, made himself known by catching Dan by the shoulder and pushing him back to the steps.

"What do youse want here?" this man asked gruffly.

"Easy there," responded Dan, freeing himself from the man's clutch, "I want to see Tom Kelly."

"He ain't here."

"Come off."

"He ain't here, I tell youse."

"Where is he then?"

"I don't know. How should I know? What do youse want of him anyway?"

Dan laughed quietly.

"Do youse t'ink I's made of mud?" he asked, "I kin tell by de way youse ask questions dat youse know where Tom Kelly is.

"I'd like to bet the drinks that he in de building now."

The man glared at Dan a moment without replying.

"What do youse say?" continued the young detective. "It's whiskey to beer that's Kelly inside."

"What do youse want of him?" asked the man again.

"I'll tell him that."

"It ain't no time of night to come to see a man."

"I know it ain't exactly perlite," responded Dan, "but what's a feller goin' to do when a lady sends him?"

Saying this he showed the edge of the envelope he carried.

"From his girl, is it?" asked the man.

"Yep."

"Well, I'll gamble that Kelly'll be glad to hear from her; you'll find him in the back room at the top of the first flight."

"Den I s'pose you'll settle for de beer when I come down?"

"Ah, chase yourself," growled the man.

Dan accordingly "chased himself" upstairs and when he had felt around in the darkness for the back room door he knocked loudly.

He repeated his knocking two or three times before there was any answer.

Finally a voice asked, "What's wanted?"

"Is that you, Kelly?" asked Dan.

"What's wanted of Kelly? He ain't here."

"Come off your perch," retorted Dan. "You can't fool me nor her that sent me here, neither."

"What's that?"

"I tell you she's a girl that can't be fooled."

There was a movement inside then as if somebody were rising from a bed.

Dan waited a moment and then called:

"Hurry on yer traps, Kelly, or she'll get tired waiting."

"Who's she?" came the question in a gruff voice.

"Nell."

There were quick steps then to the door and Dan heard the turning of a key.

The door was opened a few inches and a voice in the darkness said:

"What about Nell? Tell me quick."

"I've got a letter for you——"

"Let me have it."

"Strike a light until I can see that it's you," said Dan, holding the letter behind his back for fear that Kelly would snatch it out of his hands.

"I didn't suppose she'd write to me again," muttered the voice. "Where did you get it?"

"I s'pose the letter'll tell youse all dat," Dan answered.

The man in the darkness was evidently feeling for a match; he found one in a moment and struck it on the wall.

It burst into flame at once and Dan saw standing before him, half dressed, an ordinary specimen of the New York tough.

Dan blinked as if his eyes were not accustomed to the light and said:

"Turn on de gas, Kelly."

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?" Kelly asked, holding the match in one hand and the other curved around it to prevent it from being blown out.

"I've got a letter from Nell, dat's all you need to know," was Dan's response.

Kelly looked down at Dan's hand and saw the edge of the envelope.

He was evidently greatly interested; as quickly as he could he turned to a gas jet sticking from the wall and lit it.

Then he reached out both hands for the letter.

Dan quietly pushed down Kelly's hands with his left arm, holding the letter up with his right, so that Kelly could see it.

"This is yours, isn't it?"

"Where did you get that?" asked Kelly, starting back with a look of surprise and fear.

"That came from the ruins of the Johnson house, Kelly," responded Dan quietly.

As he said this he kept stepping close to Kelly, who was retreating all the time.

"You're a liar," hissed Kelly.

He brought up his fist suddenly and let it drive straight toward Dan's face.

The young detective was fully prepared for this. He easily warded off the blow with his left arm, and having thrust the letter into his pocket with his right, returned the blow with all his force.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### KELLY'S ALIBI.

Kelly made a desperate attempt to dodge Dan's blow, but the boy's fist landed on the crook's shoulder and sent him reeling across the room.

He brought up at the edge of his bed upon which he fell.

Dan was after him without delay.

Before Kelly could struggle to his feet the young detective had caught him around the shoulders and thrown him heavily to the floor.

The next step in this operation would have been taken quickly if there had not been an interruption.

Under Nick Carter's training Dan had learned how to reach for handcuffs and slip them quickly upon a prisoner's wrists.

That was what he tried to do now.

The bracelets were in his hand, and he was just about to close them on Kelly when somebody dashed into the room and made for him.

Dan turned instantly to defend himself.

He knew that there could be no harder customers for him to tackle than the toughs who live in Doyer street.

As he looked up he saw the man who had come to Kelly's rescue was the one with whom he had had the conversation at the street door.

"Slug him," yelled Kelly, writhing on the floor and trying to get up, "he's a detective."

"I might have known it," responded the other as he let his fist drive toward Dan's face.

Dan did not rise from the floor.

The instant he heard the man approaching he swung about and placed his knee upon Kelly's chest.

In this position he received the attack.

With his left arm he warded off the blow aimed at him and with his right he struck out at his foe.

The latter, following the force of his own blow, brought his head low down.

He might have rushed right over Kelly and Dan if the latter had not caught him squarely on the forehead with one of the steel bracelets.

It was a much more stunning blow than Dan could have given with his fist alone.

It made a big, red mark, and caused the man to stagger sideways.

Seeing that he had made a good start, Dan jumped up and helped the man along by giving him a rattling crack on the side of his face with his fist.

Naturally enough, Kelly took advantage of this to spring up.

He made for the door.

Dan, seeing that Kelly's friend had tumbled in a heap in a corner where he couldn't be of much use to himself or anybody else, leaped after Kelly.

He caught the crook at the very head of the stairs.

Kelly turned, and believing that Dan would try again to grapple him about the shoulders, aimed a right-hander at the detective's face, while with his left he struck savagely at Dan's stomach.

Dan warded off both blows but in so doing was unable to get in another at once.

The crook fought like a savage.

The single gas jet burning in the room gave little light in the narrow hall where the struggle was taking place, and neither could see just where to strike.

So for a moment they continued counfering and trying to grapple and all the time moving about the floor.

Meantime Dan heard hurried footsteps on the floors above and realized that the entire building had been aroused by the noise.

It was as certain as anything could be that unless he could get his prisoner under control quickly, all the occupants of the house would be upon him.

Every one of them would try to help Kelly.

They would fight all the more desperately if they suspected that Kelly was in trouble with a detective.

As Dan fought he was surprised at the force with which the crook resisted him.

"He knows what I want him for," thought Dan.

It seemed as if a small regiment of men was running down the stairs from above, and at the same moment there were steps rapidly ascending the stairs from the ground floor.

Another second and Dan would be entirely surrounded by desperate enemies.

This would not do.

It was hard enough to overcome this one man to say nothing of fighting a houseful.

Dan knew that under ordinary conditions he would have no great difficulty in getting control of the fellow.

Something would have to be done to avoid fighting all the other tenants in the building.

As he was struggling, he felt that his foot was over the edge of the top stair.

This gave him an idea.

He acted on it instantly. Making a desperate grab for his man in the darkness, Dan got hold of his shoulders and yanked him with all his force in the direction of the stairway.

Kelly's foot went clear over the edge of the top step.

He stumbled, and Dan gave him a push that sent him headlong down the flight.

Two men who were half way up were struck by his falling body and they tumbled to the bottom with him.

Fortunately Kelly had not managed to get hold of Dan so that the young detective was not dragged down also.

Dan went down just the same.

He took the flight in about two leaps, and landed in time to give Kelly's friends a knock-down blow each just as they were getting to their feet.

Kelly was lying half-stunned on the floor.

Dan picked him up in his strong arms, carried him out to the street and ran with him to the corner of the Bowery.

He had to stop there to get his breath.

but he had gone far enough to avoid any further trouble with the occupants of the Doyer street building.

They seemed to realize that they had tackled a customer who knew his business and who would get them all into trouble if they followed.

Looking back Dan could see that some of them were standing in a doorway staring at him and talking in angry tones.

As it was plain that they were not going to follow, he paid no further attention to them but put the nippers on Kelly's wrists and started him in a hurry for the nearest police station.

Kelly was too dazed by his fall and the blows he had received in the fight to talk at first, but presently he tried to shake himself free and said:

"I've got a right to know what youse are takin' me in for."

"Of course you have," responded Dan, "but you know without being told."

"No, I don't."

"You are more ignorant than I supposed, Kelly."

"I hain't done nothin', so help me, since I was pulled in the last time."

"I don't suppose you set the Johnson house on fire, eh?"

"I never went near the Johnson house."

"And I suppose you don't know anything about it?"

Kelly was silent.

"You'll be denying next," continued Dan, "that this letter was addressed to you."

"Deny nothin'," retorted the crook.

"Then you might as well confess and tell all you know about the scheme. It will be better for you."

"I didn't have anything to do with it," said Kelly, quietly.

"Oh, I suppose not."

"If I'd known," continued Kelly, "dat dat was what you wanted of me, I never would have put up no fight."

"Why not?"

"Cos," answered Kelly, "it will be so dead easy to prove dat I didn't, and dat I couldn't set the Johnson fire, dat I would have just gone along peaceful like a lamb and let youse have yer trouble for nothin'."

They were passing under a street lamp at this moment and Dan could see that Kelly was smiling queerly.

"I wonder what this means?" he thought. "Is it possible that Kelly has a good alibi?"

"You detective blokes," remarked Kelly, "are too fly to live. Every time some joint gets cracked you t'ink as some of us unfortunate fellers has done it, and youse pull us in widout knowin' what you're about."

"So!" said Dan.

"Dat's straight. Now dis here time youse'll have all de trouble of takin' me to de cooler for nothin'."

Dan made no response. They were nearing the station house and he felt that he had not had experience enough to argue with a crook like Kelly.

So there was no further talk until Dan brought his prisoner before the sergeant at the station.

Then the usual questions were asked of Kelly and after he had been searched he was taken to a cell.

As he was being led away he said to Dan:

"I'll give youse a pointer if youse want to come down to de door of my jug."

Thinking that perhaps the man was ready to confess and so give evidence that would convict both Kemp and Barber, Dan went into the corridor where the cells were located and waited until Kelly was locked in.

Then with a sign to the doorman that he wished to be alone with the prisoner for a moment, Dan stepped close to the grated door and asked Kelly what he had to say.

"Why, it's just dis, young fellow," Kelly responded. "You're on de wrong lay. I didn't have no hand in de Johnson house fire and I'll tell you why."

"Go ahead," said Dan.

"I got pulled in on a charge of pickin' a man's pocket. I didn't do it and dey couldn't prove on me, so when de case was tried de judge discharged me."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Dan.

"Oh, nothin'," responded Kelly, "'cept dat at de time of de fire I was in de cooler."

"Where?"

"At de Essex street station."

Dan looked sharply at the prisoner.

"Go over dere and see for yourself," said Kelly, impudently, "and you'll find dat you ain't so fly as you t'ink you are."

With this Kelly sat down on the floor of his cell and stretched himself out at full length as if he had told all he knew about the matter and nothing more could be got out of him.

Dan did not try to get anything more out of him.

The young detective felt that there must be something in what Kelly said, and he could not rest until he had tested the crook's story.

So he went at once to the Essex street station.

By inquiry there he learned that Thomas Kelly had been arrested on the day before the Johnson house fire and that he had been under lock and key from that time until three days after the fire, when he was discharged in the Essex Market court.

"What's the matter?" asked the sergeant, when he had told this to Dan.

"Oh, nothing much," answered the boy.

"But you look as if you'd lost your best friend."

"I don't know but I have," said Dan, as he wondered what Nick Carter would say when he learned that after all his theories and efforts he had arrested a man who could not possibly have had any hand in the case.

"I've had my try at it," thought Dan, gloomily, "and I've been thrown down. I can't do anything about it but go and tell Nick and confess to him that I'm no detective.

"Then I'll look for a job at sawing wood."

## CHAPTER IX.

### NICK'S THEORY.

It was now daybreak and Dan went from the police station to his home.

He did not go to bed, but took a bath, put on fresh clothes, and sat around dreading his interview with Nick.

"He'll never let me try again," was Dan's unhappy thought, "for he wouldn't want to risk me making a fool of myself twice."

Dan was no coward, however, and so when he thought it was the proper time to do so, he went up to Nick's house and determined to make a clean breast of the matter and not excuse himself in any way.

Nick was waiting for him.

"I didn't know but I'd be too early, Mr. Carter," Dan began.

"Never too early to talk business, my boy," interrupted Nick.

"In this case nothing has been lost by your delay, but next time remember to come and consult me just as soon as you get to the point where you need to, no matter what time it is."

"I'll remember," said Dan sadly, "if I ever have a chance to report to you again."

"Why, what's the matter, Dan?"

"I've slumped."

"No!" exclaimed Nick.

"Yes, sir. It's a clean case of dead wrong, from start to finish, and the worst of it is that I've gone and pulled in a man who was behind the bars at the time the fire occurred."

Nick did not look in the least surprised.

"That doesn't show," he said, "that your man didn't have something to do with the job."

"But how could he?" asked Dan.

"We'll see later; tell me all about it."

Dan hesitated just an instant, dreading to hear Nick's comments on his mistakes, and then started in with a history of his night's adventures.

He told everything, omitting no detail except that he did not make much of his own work in his encounters with toughs and crooks.

In the course of the story he produced the letter from Kelly's sweetheart and handed it to Nick, who read it and laid it on the table without a word.

"Is that all?" asked Nick, after Dan had told about proving Kelly's alibi.

"Yes, sir, and I should think it was enough to prove that I'm the biggest chump that ever thought he could be a detective."

Nick laughed a little and answered:

"Not at all, my boy; with one exception you have been right on this case from beginning to end."

"Right, sir?"

"Yes, your theory was correct and you spotted the right men."

Dan's eyes opened wide.

He could not believe his ears.

"That exception," he stammered, "must have been an awful break, for I came out dead wrong in the end."

"No, you didn't. I'll show you why after I have explained the one mistake you made in the whole business."

Dan listened attentively.

"When you managed to get that letter out of Barber's pocket," said Nick, seriously, "you ought to have made certain without any delay that it was the thing you were looking for. You had plenty of time to do so without being observed while that fight was going on in the joint."

"But," exclaimed Dan, "I saw Barber put the envelope in his side pocket. There was only one envelope there when I got my hand in and so I couldn't have got anything but the right one."

"True enough," responded Nick. "You did get the right one."

"Well, then——"

"And if you had examined it," continued Nick, "you would then have known when you finally read this letter to Tom Kelly that it was not the same thing that you stole from Barber's pocket."

He smiled when he said this and Dan was too surprised for a moment to speak.

At last he said:

"Then, Mr. Carter, those fellows must have picked my pockets more successfully that I thought when they had me down. They must have put Kelly's letter in place of the one I took from Barber."

"That is exactly what they did," responded Nick, "and the letter or paper Kemp and Barber took from you is in their possession."

"It's all right, my boy," Nick went on without waiting for Dan to ask any questions.

"You understand the one mistake you made and now I'll tell you my end of the story.

"I liked your theory of the case and believed there was something in it.

"It was your first experience in doing detective work and I wanted you to handle the case alone, as far as possible, but I couldn't be certain until you had some experience that you could get along without danger to yourself.

"I knew that you would be tackling some of the most desperate criminals in the city before you got through it and so I decided to keep an eye on you.

"I strolled over to the Johnson house a little after midnight and stepped inside the front door.

"I head a noise upstairs that showed that somebody was at work.

"I took it for granted that you were on deck and so I went out again and crossed the street.

"I waited there quite a while until I feared that something might be going wrong with you and decided to enter the house again.

"I had got part way across the street when you came running out.

"I didn't want you to know that I was watching the case for I wanted you to handle it all by yourself.

"I dodged back hoping that you wouldn't see me and believing that if you did you would reason exactly as you did and go on with what you were about.

"You did just right in not paying any attention to me at that minute.

"Of course I could see that something important had happened, so I followed you around to the other street and watched you shadow your man to the all-night dive.

"I know that dive of old. There isn't a tougher one in the city.

"I made up my mind at once that I should join you there, for if you had happened to make any mistake the toughs would have jumped on you and that would have ended your career as a detective.

"As you know, I am always prepared for such things, and it was not long after you had gone in when I gave the signal too and easily passed the doorkeeper."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Dan, suddenly, "then you were the quarrelsome tough—— Excuse me, I mean——"

"You needn't apologize," interrupted Nick with a smile, "I was the tough and I suppose I played my part well.

"It would have been easy for me to give you a hint as to who I was, but, as I

have said, I wanted you to handle the case alone and I wanted to see how you did it."

"I was not long in seeing that you were trying to pick a man's pocket, and as I thought over your theory of the case, I concluded that you had seen your man take away from the Johnson house something that might prove to be a key to the hidden treasure.

"I hoped you would succeed, but when I saw Barber pull himself around in his chair, and hitch up his coat, I knew that you were downed.

"That was why I started the fight."

"I thought at the time that it was a most fortunate thing for me," said Dan.

"Yes, I supposed that you would take advantage of the racket to get what you wanted.

"Those fellows kept me pretty busy for a minute or two, but when I saw you dart back to a corner I felt pretty certain that you had got what you wanted and lit out.

"I didn't go far away for I knew that there would be something more to happen.

"I hung around and saw you come out and wait for Barber and Kemp.

"I supposed of course that you were going to shadow one of them, and I had made up my mind to shadow the other, when they pitched into you.

"It looked for a time as if you were going to do them up and so I didn't interfere until they got you down. Then as I ran up I saw Barber putting something into your inside pocket.

"I had an idea of what the scheme was and it struck me it would be best to let it work.

"If my theory is as good as yours we shall get the two men more surely than if I had nabbed them at that minute.

"So I let them get away from me and staid near just long enough to make certain that you were not seriously hurt.

"When I was sure of that I started off after Kemp and Barber.

"My experience in such matters made it comparatively easy for me to find them again for I knew just about where they would go.

"Next time I saw them I had a different disguise on and I didn't have much trouble in satisfying myself that my theory was just as good as yours."

"I begin to think," said Dan, "that there was something in my theory, after all, but I would like to know what yours is if you don't mind telling."

"Of course not. My theory is simply a continuation of yours.

"I think that Kelly was a member of the gang. Whether he meant to have any hand in the fire or not, I don't know, but I guess not.

"Probably he showed his sweetheart's letter to these fellows and told them he wouldn't have anything to do with it.

"Then he either gave them the letter or they took it from him and went about the job without his help.

"What Kemp found behind the mopboard was undoubtedly a key to the Johnson treasure.

"They managed to get that away from you and put Kelly's letter in your pocket so as to make you arrest Kelly.

"Before the day is over they will know that Kelly is under arrest and they will suppose that you won't pay any more attention to the Johnson house.

"So they will go there to-night for the purpose of finding the treasure.

"We'll take a hand in that operation. Meantime you go home and sleep.

"Report to me here at six o'clock this evening.

"You've done splendidly, Dan, and will undoubtedly make a rattling good detective."

Dan went away much happier than when he came and at six o'clock sharp he was again at Nick Carter's house.

Nick did not think necessary to use any disguises.

As soon as it was dark they went to the Johnson house and concealed themselves in a room next to the kitchen.

As Nick had expected the treasure-hunters came early.

This time, as before, they made their entrance by going through the plumbers' shop in the building at the back.

When they had come to the kitchen they opened the slide of a dark lantern and examined a paper that one of them took from his pocket.

It evidently directed them to the cellar

for they went downstairs presently and Nick and Dan followed.

Barber and Kemp went to the wall of the cellar next to the street and after consulting their paper again, pressed hard upon one of the stones.

It yielded a little at the first pressure, showing that it was attached to some kind of mechanism.

It was evident that the hinges or pulleys had grown rusty since they were put in place, for the stone moved slowly and it took all their force to work it.

At length, however, they pushed the stone far in and it left an opening almost large enough for a man to crawl into.

They reached in their arms and with many exclamations of satisfaction began to pull out gold and silver plate and bags of coin.

"We'll take that, please," said Nick, quietly.

At the same instant he flashed his electric lamp upon them and the startled criminals turning saw the two detectives standing with leveled revolvers.

"Put up your gun, Dan," added Nick, "and work the bracelets."

Dan immediately obeyed and before the treasure-hunters had recovered from their surprise they were manacled.

It was short work taking them to the station where a number of policemen were assigned to go to the ruined house, take away all the treasure and put it where it could be kept safely for the owners of the property.

There was no trouble about convicting Kemp and Barber of setting the house on fire, for beside the evidence that Dan had so cleverly gained, there was a full confession from Kelly of all that he knew about the scheme which he made as soon as he learned that his former partners were under arrest.

Dan looked forward eagerly to his next case and with his mind made up that next time he secured any important evidence he would mark it in such a way that he would be sure to know it again.

[THE END.]

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